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AUTHOR Michel, George J.
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ABSTRACT

This study produces demonstrable evidence that content analysis of school board minutes is a useful and promising methodology for studying demand processing. Demand processing is the conversion to outputs of the demands, needs, desires, or inputs presented to the school board. Use of the technique in a school district in each of two States showed that most input demands of a school district begin with the State educational agencies and seem guided by an apparent State objective to provide and maintain public education. In California, the State dominated demands in two areas -- school finance and school facilities; while, in New York, there did not appear to be an equal press in these areas. It was also true, however, that federal agencies accounted for most demands in another finance area of federal aid, but the demands were proportionally few and most were routine. Greater differences were found between the districts in curriculum, personnel, and issues of general concern. (Author)

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EASTON'S DEMAND PROCESSING IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF TWO STATES

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George J. Michel, Ed.D.

State University of New York at Albany

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Systems theory examines the actions of an organization by studying its political inputs and outputs.[1] The inputs of a school organization are demands or supports from the organizations and the people who are part of the organization. They are the needs and desires of the people presented to the school board and converted to outputs, and these conversions are called demand processing.

Even though the concepts of political science may apply to the school organization, research methods for applying them have been sadly lacking and have fallen far behind the theory. For example, Varney developed one method of investigating school demands presented to the board of trustees at a community college.[2] Using a traditional problem solving model, he found that administrators identified most of the demands and they also processed most of them. A further refinement and a more thorough integration of Easton's demand processing was accomplished by Scribner in his study of the school board of Palo Alto, California.[3] By observing a series of six school board meetings, Scribner identified a number of differing kinds of demands in a single case study, but the problems of researching the concept and translating it to less abstract areas of school organizational functioning still remained.

One instance of further refinement of research procedures was the classification of school organization demands into five broad areas of school functioning which were school finance, curriculum, personnel, facilities, and issues of general concern. According to Gross and Norton, there were 23 different kinds of demands which were further classed into the five areas of functioning.[4,5] While this methodological objective was the primary goal of the current study, a secondary goal was to test hypotheses about the five demand areas in comparable school districts

in different states. The major hypothesis was that there would be no difference in demand processing in school finance, curriculum, personnel, facilities, or issues of general concern in the school districts.

The sample districts were selected for their comparability. Both served student populations of nearly 3,500. They were located in small communities with populations of 15,000, and there was a steady growth of the industrial and agricultural base in each city. The advantages of being able to conduct an interstate study far outweighed the disadvantages of not having a matched pair of school organizations especially since the major purpose was to develop a methodology to study demand processing. Though the districts were not specifically equal in every respect, they were defined as roughly equivalent with one being a railroad center in California and the other a college community in upstate New York.

Observations and Data Reduction

Content analysis of the minutes of school board meetings in the sample school districts was the primary means of qualifying and quantifying demands. The school board meetings were assumed to be the settings for processing these demands since official school district actions took place at the meetings and a public record of them was available. Although such records did not provide an account of the human interaction and judgments which were part of demand processing, Selznick emphasized that such public records were still an important exhibit of demand processing.[6]

Political analyses usually utilize central tendency statistics or proportions to compare school organizations. Such statistics can be particularly misleading since they can lead to erroneous conclusions based solely on large numbers of demands. The significance of a pro-

portion test for independent samples is a non-parametric test comparing proportions of demands to a hypothetical population of demands and allowing for use of a statistical decision at the .05 level. A stringent decision rule at this level assured that any differences between the demands of the sample districts reflected an absolute differences rather than merely a quantitative difference.

A six month period of school board meetings in 1967-1968 of the California school district was compared to the identical months in 1969-70 of the New York State district. Despite this second limitation involving different time periods, the analysis of the five areas of school functioning provided interesting contrasts in demand processing.

School Finance Demands

As expected, there were many similarities in demand processing between the two school districts. TABLE 1 shows that the total demands in school finance were not significantly different. However, within the area of school finance there were statistical differences found in school tax, school bonds, the federal aid demands. These findings indicated that the New York State district processed more demands in school taxes than the California district. Observations of the demands showed that they were from individuals requesting reduced tax assessments. Basic to explaining these differences was a difference in state practices. In California such tax reduction requests are processed by the county tax assessor, while in New York this function seemed to be a task partially performed by the school board. Thus, state practices which assigned these functions to different governmental levels directly influenced demand processing in the sample school districts.

TABLE 1

Political Demands on a New York State and a California School District For a Six Month Period, 1967-1969

Demand Area	New York District	California District	Z-Score
School Finance			
School Budget	15	14	.47
School Taxes	5	--	3.56**
Federal Aid	4	2	2.96**
State Aid	2	2	- .13
School Bonds	--	6	-4.17**
Total	26	24	- .50
Curriculum			
Present Teaching Methods	4	1	.63
Curriculum Additions	5	7	-4.17**
Athletics	1	--	1.43
Total	10	8	1.07
Personnel			
Teachers	20	18	.34
Students	7	5	- .44
School Board	12	9	.43
Administrators	4	5	.69
Clerical-Maintenance	9	7	.26
Total	52	44	2.48*
Facilities			
School Facility Adequacy	15	31	-3.02**
General Issues			
Sex Education	--	2	-2.08**
Reorganization	--	2	-2.08**
Total	--	4	-2.57**
ALL DEMANDS	103	111	--

* Significant at the .05 level
** Significant at the .001 level

Among the school bond demands, the California district treated six while the New York State district treated none. The significant difference demonstrated an actual difference in facilities planning. In the California district a bond election was held, the voters approved it, and the county clerk contested the election on technical grounds. Meanwhile, the inactivity in the New York State district in school bond demands attested to the inadequacy of facilities planning. For if the assumption is made that sutdent population growth were equal in both districts, then there would be an equal need for a continuous school building program. The neglect of this program in the New York State district was attributed to either inadequate administrative planning or community restraints against new school buildings.

In contrast to the school bond demands, the demands about federal aid in the New York State district were significantly more frequent than in the California district. While this appeared as a favorable finding, further analysis showed the demands to be routine and ordinary rather than meaningful to the school programs. These routine demands in the New York State district included standard reports about the school lunch program, the National Defense Education Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Most were also predictable responses to legal requirements which were parts of the federal aid programs. Certainly routine reports about the federal aid programs are necessary, but without evaluative reporting, it appeared that these reports to the school board served to hinder rather than improve the district programs. In this respect, the quality of federal aid responses in both districts was deplorably deficient.

Curriculum Demands

Statistics also showed that the curriculum demands in the sample districts were significantly different in some areas, but logical analysis showed these were situational rather than real differences. Neither district differed in processing the demands of present teaching methods or athletics, but statistical differences were found in curriculum additions where it appeared that the California district processed proportionally more demands.

This conclusion demonstrated how statistical analysis coupled with logical analysis provided a more complete understanding of demand processing. According to the statistical findings, the California district processed more curricular additions than the New York State district, but the conclusion proved to be invalid when logical analysis was added. It showed that these demands were inflated in the California district because of conflict with the state in gaining approval for a new summer school program. This difficulty caused the district to make responses to several demands made by the state department of education about the summer program. Actually, the California district had processed only two curricular additions, a new physical education program and the controversial summer school program. On the other hand, the New York State district processed written specifications for a new learning center, added a reading consultant to its Title I program, and approved an art seminar at the secondary level. In all, it was the New York State district, not the California district, that did slightly better in introducing new curricular strands into its programs.

Personnel Demands

Only total demands in personnel were found to be significantly different between the sample districts. In total demands, the New York State

district treated proportionally more personnel matters, but no further evidence was available on why personnel demands assumed more importance in this district. One speculation was that negotiations with various subsystems had received greater emphasis in New York State than in California during the period of the study; however, this is a hypothesis subject to debate and further study, not a bonified finding of the study.

Facility Demands

Of the three classes of demands in the facilities area, there were no differences in processing between the two districts except for those in school facility adequacy. Here the California district processed significantly more demands proportionally than the New York State district. Again, however, logical analysis showed that the California district treated a series of demands actually generated from its state department of education. State laws on structurally deficient school buildings in California required a series of structural reports attesting to the safety of the building. This demand also led the school board to request a feasibility study of the middle school concept to replace an unsafe building. The analysis further showed that there were no parallel demands for school safety in New York State, hence the differences between the two districts were again a function of state intervention rather than differences in demand processing.

General Demands

The California school district also processed significantly more demands under the rubric of general demands than the New York State district. In the New York State district, there was little controversy while the California district treated four controversial demands.

The issue of sex education was initially raised in the California district by a group of concerned parents and teachers. Added strength came when a school principal in the district supported the request for a sex education program, and the school board accepted and adopted such a program.

In contrast to this parent oriented demand, a strong state demand for reorganizing small school districts emanated from the state legislature in California. It was directed to rural districts and was meant to encourage these districts to combine into larger, more efficient ones. The California district processed two such demands, one was a report by the county on the progress toward reorganization and the other was a letter informing teachers of some reorganization changes. As in the areas of school facility adequacy and sex education, there was no similar demand in New York State; therefore, the district in that state could not be answerable for not processing demands on reorganization.

Summary and Conclusions

With a reasonable success, there now exists demonstrable evidence in this study that content analysis of school board minutes is a useful and promising methodology for studying demand processing. Use of the techniques in two states showed that most input demands of a school district begin with the state educational agencies and most seem guided by an apparent state objective to provide and maintain public education. In California, the state dominated demands in two areas, school finance and school facilities while in New York there did not appear to be an equal press in these areas. It was also true, however, that federal agencies accounted for most demands in another finance area of federal aid, but the demands were proportionally few and most were routine.

Greater differences were found between the districts in curriculum, personnel, and issues of general concern where the New York State district displayed greater efforts in developing new curricula and responding to the personnel concerns of its employees. Juxtaposed to this is the California district's strong responses to demands for a sex education program which was the result of the enterprising effort of its constituent parents.

A basis for comparing school district functioning in the two most populous states in the Union has long eluded the efforts of educational researchers and educators alike. It now appears that with demand processing as a conceptual tool, such comparisons may be near at hand. However, further research efforts must consider studies where stricter controls can be maintained on relevant independent vaiables and where the generalizability of such comparisons can be extended by increasing the sample sizes.

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